

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A device for controlling selected functions of a machine, said machine including a seat and at least one armrest associated with said seat, said at least one armrest having upper and lower surface portions and being supportably positionable adjacent to said seat, said device comprising:
an interface module having a connecting portion and a working portion, said interface module connecting portion being pivotally connectable to said at least one armrest and adapted to shift said working portion laterally between a retracted position and an extended position relative to said at least one armrest.
2. A device, as set forth in claim 1, wherein in said retracted position said interface module working portion is at least partially concealed by said at least one armrest and in said extended position said interface module working portion is substantially free from obstruction by said at least one armrest.
3. A device, as set forth in claim 2, wherein said interface module working portion moves laterally between said retracted and extended positions along a first plane extending generally horizontally below said at least one armrest lower surface portion and at an elevational position sufficient that said interface module working portion is at least partially located below said at least one armrest lower surface portion when said interface module working portion is in said retracted position.
4. A device, as set forth in claim 3, wherein said at least one armrest lower surface portion includes a blocking portion extending substantially perpendicularly outward from said lower surface portion at a location sufficient

to limit retraction of said interface module to a predetermined amount, leaving a portion of said interface module working portion free from obstruction by said at least one armrest when said working portion is in said retracted position.

5. A device, as set forth in claim 1, wherein said at least one armrest includes a hollow region located between said upper and lower surface portions; and

said interface module moves laterally between said retracted and extended positions along a second plane extending generally horizontally through said hollow region and at an elevational position sufficient that said interface module working portion is at least partially located within said hollow region when said working portion is in said retracted position.

6. A device, as set forth claim 1, wherein said interface module includes a plurality of actuating devices associated with respective machine functions;

said working portion of said interface module includes an upwardly convex generally ovoid surface; and

said plurality of actuating devices are arranged on said upwardly convex generally ovoid surface at respective locations selected to facilitate manual manipulation of said actuating devices.

7. A device, as set forth in claim 1, including an interface module connecting mechanism adapted to interconnect said interface module connecting portion and said at least one armrest.

8. A device, as set forth in claim 7, wherein said interface module connecting mechanism includes a pivot pin connectably engagable with said interface module connecting portion and said at least one armrest along an

axis of rotation substantially perpendicular to said at least one armrest surface portions.

9. A device, as set forth in claim 7, wherein said interface module connecting mechanism includes a linkage having a first end portion connectable to said interface module connecting portion and a second end portion connectable to said at least one armrest.

10. A device, as set forth in claim 9, wherein said linkage includes at least first and second link arms, each of said first and second link arms being spaced apart one from the other and having first end portions pivotally connectable to said interface module connecting portion and second end portions pivotally connectable to said at least one armrest.

11. A device, as set forth in claim 1, wherein said seat includes left-hand and right-hand armrests, each of said at least one armrests including an interface module having one of a left-hand and right-hand configuration determined in response to the respective left-hand and right-hand position of the associated armrest.

12. A method for controllably interacting with a machine, said machine including a seat having at least one armrest supportably positionable adjacent to said seat, comprising the steps of:

providing an interface module having a connecting portion and a working portion;

pivally connecting said interface module connecting portion to said at least one armrest;

selecting an interface module working portion stored mode by moving said interface module working portion laterally toward said at least one

armrest until said working portion is at least partially concealed by said at least one armrest; and

selecting an interface module working portion working mode by moving said interface module working portion laterally away from said at least one armrest until said working portion is substantially free from obstruction by said at least one armrest.

13. A machine, comprising:

an operator's station, said operator's station including a seat having at least one armrest, said at least one armrest having an upper and lower surface portion and being supportably positionable adjacent to said seat;

an interface module having a connecting portion and a working portion; and

wherein said interface module connecting portion is connectable to said at least one armrest and is adapted to move laterally between a retracted position wherein said working portion is at least partially concealed by said at least one armrest and an extended position wherein said working portion is substantially free from obstruction by said at least one armrest.